(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Check for updates

Violence in Cameroon Schools: Problems and solutions for a peaceful school environment

Ojong Angela Ojong [1, *], Etengeneng Johanes Ojong [2] and Egbe Sylvester Tabot [2]

[1] Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, P.O. Box 63.
[2] Department of Town Planning, National Advanced School of Public Works Yaoundé, P.O. Box 510 Yaoundé-Cameroon.

Abstract

In recent times, violence is common amongst schools in Cameroon especially in the urban milieu. This has a negative consequence on students, teachers, school administrators, the school and the community at large. Violence within the school environment include fighting, bullying, weapon use, gender-based violence, harassment, rape, sexual harassment and abuse, corporal punishment, assault, insults, noise-making, gang violence, religious discrimination, gambling, vandalism, alcohol and drug use. However, a conducive, peaceful and a safe school environment is essential for teaching and learning for students, teachers, school and the community. The main objective of this study is to propose solutions for a peaceful school environment and to establish guidelines inspired by the community by suggesting options that are long term solutions to mitigate violence in Cameroon schools. The concepts reviewed in this study were violent behaviour, school violence and peaceful school environment. The secondary data collection was the acquisition and review of already published literature information concerning violence in Cameroon schools. A desk study was carried out to analyse the types, causes, problems and suggested solutions for a peaceful school environment. This study proposed options for sustainable solutions in order to mitigate violence in Cameroon schools.

Keywords: Violence; Schools; School Violence; Peaceful School Environment

1. Introduction

Violence in schools is a common problem in recent times in many countries of the world. An estimated 246 million children experience school violence every year with girls and gender non-conforming people that are disproportionately affected (UNESCO, 2017). In most Secondary schools in Cameroon today, violence is a common problem that has often resulted to injury and the demise of students and teachers. This is a worrisome menace to the school environment as well as the educational stakeholders especially the school authorities that has the obligation to provide a conducive and convivial learning school environment. A positive and a good learning environment is important for the success of students as it promotes academic achievements (*Geeta, 2019).*

But the provision of a good learning environment for schools in Cameroon is the responsibility of all the stakeholders such as the students, teachers, administrative staffs, parents, community, civil society organizations like the church, Ministry of Secondary Education and the Government. The problem plaguing the school environment requires a holistic approach from all these stakeholders. Violence in Cameroon schools necessitate a policy and solution-oriented mechanism and approach to mitigate violent actions in schools and why not a panacea to totally solve all the violence in Cameroon schools for a peaceful school environment.

---

* Corresponding author: Ojong Angela Ojong

Therefore, the objectives of this study seek to access the school as a refuge for people to foster good; to analyse the concepts of violent behaviour, school violence and peaceful school environment; to examine violent behaviours emanating from students, teachers and administrative staffs; to propose solutions for a peaceful school environment and to establish guidelines inspired by the community by suggesting options that are long term solutions to mitigate violence in Cameroon schools.

1.1. Conceptual View

The concepts reviewed in this study to access violence in Cameroon schools with emphasis on problems and solutions for a peaceful school environment were violent behaviour, school violence and peaceful school environment.

1.2. Violent Behaviour

There is great concern about the proliferation of violent behaviours in the school environment perpetrated by students, teachers and administrative staffs. Violent behaviour is defined as any act or threat of physical, verbal or psychological aggression or the destruction or abuse of property by any individual and the threats may include veiled, conditional or direct threats in verbal, written, electronic or gestural form, resulting in intimidation, harassment, harm or endangerment to the safety of another person or property (Law Insider Dictionary, 2013).

Violent behaviour is a troubling issue. It is supposed to be taken seriously, looked and understood by the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Government. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2017), violent behaviours in children and adolescents can include a wide range of behaviours: explosive temper tantrums, physical aggression, fighting, threats or attempts to hurt others (including thoughts of wanting to kill others), use of weapons, cruelty toward animals, fire setting, intentional destruction of property and vandalism.

1.3. School Violence

School violence refers to violence that takes place in a school setting and this includes violence on school property, on the way to or from school and at school trips and events (Gupta, 2022). School violence is any activity that can create a disturbance in an educational environment. It includes verbal and physical disagreements, bullying through electronic means or social media, threats, the use of weapon and gang activity. Bullying is a serious concern in school that can be verbal such as being threatened, called names or insulted and physical such as being pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on (Borum *et al.*, 2010). School violence can also be defined as a physical or verbal disagreement on the way to school, on the way home from school or at a school event that can cause physical or psychological harm to another individual, school or community.

1.4. Peaceful School Environment

Students in school who are at peace with themselves are happy. Schools that support peace ensure happiness, well-being, psychological health and academic achievement. Peace expresses itself in three forms that include peace with nature, social peace and inner peace and should thus serve to create an environment that fosters the human potential optimally (Balasooriya, 2001). Peaceful school environment is defined as the quality and character of school life and includes the values, unwritten beliefs and attitudes that become the style of interaction among students, teachers and school administrators (Sukran, 2020).

A peaceful school environment is important and necessary to nurture and transform the students, teachers and administrative staffs in a school. A peaceful school is a place that grows and sustains peaceful individuals, peaceful relationships, a peaceful school community and peace work in the world (Sukran, 2020). It is appropriate to maintain a peaceful school environment for the benefit of all the school stakeholders. Peaceful environments take time to build and take continual care in order to maintain and the process of creating and implementing peaceful environments, are in turn nurturing peaceful and caring children (Levin, 2003). A school is a place that enhance the growth and development of students.
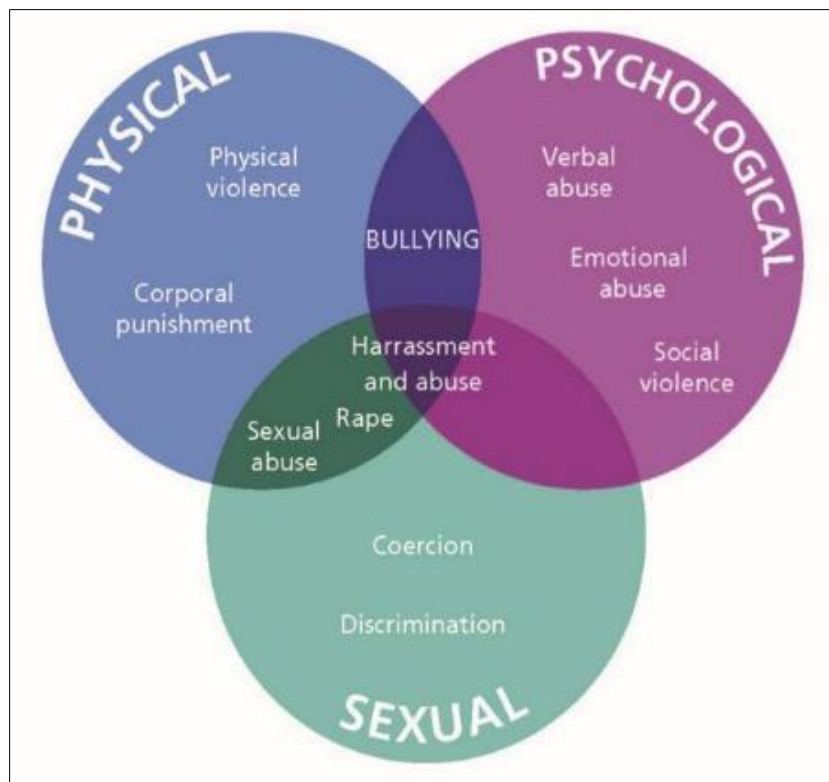
2. Methodology

This study involved the acquisition of secondary data via existing information. The secondary data collection was the acquisition and review of already published literature information obtained from text books, articles, journals, magazines, reports and documents. The internet sources were also used to acquire current and past literature on issues related to violent behaviour, school violence, peaceful school environment and violence in Cameroon schools. A desk study was carried out to analyse the causes, problems and suggested solutions for a peaceful school environment. This study proposed options for sustainable solutions in order to mitigate violence in Cameroon schools.

2.1. Types, Causes of Violence and Solutions for a Peaceful School Environment

2.1.1. Types of School Violence

Some of the types of school violence according to UNESCO, (2020) are as follows:

- **Physical Violence**; This includes any kind of physical aggression, the use of weapons, as well as criminal acts like theft or arson.
- **Psychological Violence**; This includes emotional and verbal abuse. This may involve insulting, threatening, ignoring, isolating, rejecting, name-calling, humiliating, ridiculing, rumour-mongering, lying or punishing another person.
- **Sexual Violence**; This includes sexual harassment, sexual intimidation, unwanted touching, sexual coercion and rape.
- **Bullying**; This can take physical, psychological or sexual forms and is characterized by repeated and intentional aggression towards another person.
- **Cyberbullying**; This includes sexual or psychological abuse by people connected through school on social media or other online platforms. This may involve posting false information, hurtful comments, malicious rumours, embarrassing photos or videos online. Cyberbullying can also take the form of excluding someone from online groups or networks. According to White Jane (2019), school violence and bullying include physical, psychological and sexual violence as illustrated in Figure 1.

Source: Addressing School Violence and Bullying, NHS Health Scotland, 2019.

Figure 1 School Violence and Bullying

According to Life Persona (2022), the most common violence carried out in school is from teacher to student, from student to teacher, from student to student (bullying) and from teacher to teacher and school violence is made up of aggressive acts perpetrated by and for members of the educational community (teachers, students, administrative staffs, cleaning staffs, student relatives, among others). School violence originates and develops in the school or in neighbouring places that are linked to it, affecting the teaching-learning process and the physical and mental stability of the victim. However, according to Life Persona (2022), the ten types of school violence are as follows:

2.2. Violence of the Teacher to the Student

It refers to those violent acts carried out by the teachers towards the students using the authority that confers their position. This type of violence was very common throughout most of the 20th century, when physical punishment was used when a student misbehaved or did not do what was established by the teacher. For example, when teachers beat a rule to students who disobeyed the rules or called them "donkeys", "brutes", "good for nothing". Also, when the left hand was tied to the lefties in order to write with the right hand since they considered that was the correct form of writing. Consequently, the necessary measures were taken to eradicate this type of violence, for which laws were created to ensure the physical and psychological integrity of the students. However, this type of violence continues to be present only to a lesser extent.

2.3. Violence of the Student to the Teacher

This type of violence constitutes acts of physical, psychological and verbal violence, for example: making fun of teachers' clothes, insulting and cursing them during and outside the class, death threats, among others. In many cases teachers do not realize that they are victims of school violence, since they consider that insults and ridicule (acts of violence more common) pose no risk, obviating the psychological damage they generate.

2.4. Exclusion

This type of violence occurs when a group of students decide to "put aside "a student. They act as if this person did not exist, causing them to be isolated. Exclusion is a type of psychological violence and can become one of the most common causes of suicide.

2.5. Intimidation

Bullying is the act of infusing fear with threats and using it to make victims do what the victimizer wants.

2.6. Sexual Violence

This type of violence happens when there is the presence of inappropriate sexual behaviours within the educational community. Sexual violence is all sexual innuendo, showing the genitals and physical contact without consent (friction of the skin with the hand or some other part of the body and even force the sexual act). This type of violence can be done by a teacher to a student or vice versa, by a student to another student, by a teacher to another teacher, among others.

2.7. Coercion

This type of violence refers to violence against someone in order to force them to do something that they do not want. Coercion, like intimidation, uses threats to achieve what you want. However, it also uses physical violence.

2.8. Bullying (bullying or harassment)

He bullying or bullying is an act of repeated violence. It refers to all kinds of abuse (mockery, physical abuse, among others) made to a student, teacher or other member of the educational community. Through bullying, the perpetrator can exercise physical and psychological control over his victim to the point of manipulating it at will. Bullying is one of the most common forms of school violence and one of the causes of teen suicide.

2.9. Vandalism

School vandalism refers to those acts of destruction against the facilities and assets of educational institutions. Therefore, it is considered an act of disrespect. In that sense, it can be said that graffiti made without permission of the highest authority of the Educational Unit represent an act of vandalism which results in the suspension of classes (when it damages the structure of institutions or when the furniture is stolen)

2.10. Violence among Teachers

This type of violence is not very common in the educational community. It refers to all the mockery and abuse done by one teacher to another. Violence among teachers also includes harassment, sexual violence, coercion, intimidation, among others.

2.11. Violence of Parents and Teacher's Representatives

It consists of all those threats and physical damages done by parents and teachers' representatives.

Furthermore, according to Life Persona (2022), other acts of violence carried out in school are:

- Use or sell drugs within the facilities of the Educational Institution.
- Carrying white and firearms inside the facilities of the Educational Institution.
- Put bombs and carry out shootings inside the facilities of the Educational Institution.
- Kidnap members of the educational community.
- Carry out robberies and thefts within the educational institution or in the surrounding areas.
- Use or sell alcoholic beverages at the institution.
- Inciting the consumption of narcotics.
- Theft of answers from exams to be done in class.

2.11.1. Causes of Violence

According to Boran and Taskan (2021), the causes of school violence can be grouped into factors stated as follows:

- Individual Factors or characteristics of the Child;
- Factors related to Family;
- Social Factors;
- School related Factors.

There often isn't a simple, straight forward reason why someone engages in school violence but a child may have been bullied or rejected by a peer, may be under a lot of academic pressure, or may be enacting something they have seen at home, in their neighbourhood, on television or in a video game (Nemours Foundation, 2022).

According to Ehiri *et al.,* (2017), some of the risk factors that can make a child more likely to commit school violence include poor academic performance; prior history of violence; hyperactive or impulsive personality; mental health conditions; witnessing or being a victim of violence; alcohol, drug or tobacco use; dysfunctional family dynamic; domestic violence or abuse; access to weapons; delinquent peers; poverty; high crime rates in the community; harmful religious or cultural practices; under resourced schools; lack of teacher training regarding child-development; harsh or violent parenting; taboo/silence surrounding violence in the community.

However, other causes of violence in schools include; poor or insufficient parental upbringing or the home where the child is coming from, cultural background, lack of professional ethics from teachers and school administrators, students vulnerability with the use of android phones, lack or insufficient sex education to students, lack or insufficient religion education to students, hate speech or language from a student to another and from a teacher or administrative staff to a student and vice versa, generational curses and wayward behaviour of the child, negative peer group influence as well as peer pressure from class and school mates and friends.

2.12. Solutions for a Peaceful School Environment

2.12.1. Reinforcing Parental Guidance

Parents should continue to advice, orientate and caution their children. Fathers and mothers play a great role to support and help their children to become responsible and upright citizen be it at home, school environment, the community and the nation.

2.12.2. Continues Proper Home Training and Positive Moral Values

They should be continuing effort to properly train children at home with household activities such as washing of dishes, washing dresses, cleaning the house and cooking. Positive moral behaviours such as washing the hands before eating, prayer before food, watching educative television programs and do the school assignment on time should be inculcated to children by parents at home. These training and positive moral character learned at home would transform the students to uphold a positive moral behaviour for a peaceful school environment.

2.12.3. Compulsory Installation of Surveillance Camera

The installation of surveillance camera should become a school policy for all the schools in Cameroon. This device will scan and detect dangerous weapons and harmful objects such as knives and guns that have been hidden by students.

2.12.4. Forbid the Use of Smartphones by Students

Be it at home or in school, students should be forbidden, ban and totally refuse from using the smartphones. This should also become a school policy initiated and properly followed by the supervisory Ministry (Ministry of Secondary Education). Smartphones distract the students to study. Due to curiosity, peer influence and peer pressure, some students are vulnerable and engage in watching pornographic films and movies on smartphones. Also, smartphones make the students to be vulnerable to cybercrime and other negative ills associated with social media. Most of the bullying, fighting and sexual harassment cause by students in school are copied or imitated on smartphones that are send or forwarded via social media platform such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

2.12.5. Compulsory Sex Education to Students

Sex education should be included or introduced in the school curriculum from Class Three to Upper Sixth as a subject or discipline or course. This will help the students to acquire information and knowledge to help them to be careful, cautious, avoid risks and to help themselves when dealing with sex and relationships. Sex education equips and empowers students to make decisions about their bodies and choices that result to lower rates of unplanned pregnancy, lower rates of sexually transmitted infections, delays in starting sex and increases in protective behaviours including condom and contraception use.

2.12.6. Compulsory Religious Studies to all Students

Religious Studies should be included in the school curriculum as an academic field. Religious Studies should be taught to all the students in all the classes from Class One to Upper Sixth. The study of Religion will inculcate, enlighten and expose the students with positive, ideal and best moral values, good behaviours and practices in the home as well as the community and the school environment. Importantly primordial is the fact that Religious Studies can inculcate and educate the students with the fear of God. And in Proverbs 9:10-The New King James Version of the bible, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding". Religious Studies should become a policy to all the schools in Cameroon.

2.12.7. Harmonise Monitoring and Control of Students

The mitigation of violence in school requires the consent and concerted initiative of all the stakeholders to elaborate a consensual plan, for the monitoring and control of the different types of violence in school. Monitoring and controlling watch the behaviour, lifestyle and activities of the students in school to ensure that the way of life of the students should fall within the approved and authorised rules and moral standards of the school. The stakeholders such as the parents, teachers, administrative staff, security guards, forces of law and order (Gendarmes and Police), the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs should elaborate a coherent, concise and consistent planning schedule to monitor and control violence in school.

2.12.8. Corporal Punishment and Labour

Physical punishment should be meted to very recalcitrant and stubborn students by beating them cautiously and carefully with a cane or a belt to prevent or deter them from involving into violence in school. Teachers and administrative staffs should punish violent students physically by hitting them cautiously with a hard object such as a cane or a belt on their buttocks or palms. Another physical punishment that should be meted to students is labour that include cleaning the classrooms and the school campus; clearing grass and collection of litters, rubbish or waste material littering at the school campus.

2.12.9. Involvement, Commitment and Engagement of all Parents in School Association

All the parents should get involve with the activities of the school. All the parents should join or become members of the Parents Teachers Association (P.T.A.) in order to know and obtain important information on the happenings and activities of the school. They should be a synergy between the parents, teachers and administrative staffs to properly and thoroughly follow-up the students in school and even at home or the community.

2.12.10. Training Workshops and Seminars on Ethics and Deontology

The Ministry of Secondary Education should organise and coordinate school workshops and seminars on professional ethics and deontology for teachers and administrative staffs. These workshops and seminars should be conducted every semester or at least once a year to all the schools in every Sub-Division or Division; in order to inculcate, educate and enlighten the teachers and administrative staffs with positive professional ethical behaviour to maintain, show and demonstrate an ideal moral behaviour in the school environment.

2.12.11. Options for Sustainable Solutions to Mitigate Violence in Cameroon Schools

Since sustainable development has become the guiding principle to environment and development at the international, national, regional and local levels, this chapter focuses on the sustainable options to continue to solve or deal with violence in Cameroon schools in the present and the future. These options are long term solutions that can reduce violence in Cameroon schools.

2.12.12. Centre for Psychosocial Support, Counselling and Reformation

The centre for psychosocial support, counselling and reformation should comprise of officials of the Ministry of Secondary Education, Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Public Health. This centre under the supervision of the Ministry of Secondary Education, should be established at the regional headquarters to help recalcitrant, stubborn and violent students to identify their problems, find solutions, build them, empower them and develop them.

2.12.13. Independent Violence Assessment Institution

The creation of a national establishment absolutely independent and autonomous charge with the assessment, research, documentation, formulation of policy and solutions to curb violence in Cameroon schools. An independent institution of this caliber is perceived to carry out a proper and detailed violence assessment, analyses, diagnosis, research and propose solutions to the government for action to be taken in matters relating to violence in Cameroon schools. Thus, this institution should focus on policy and solution-oriented in issues of violence.

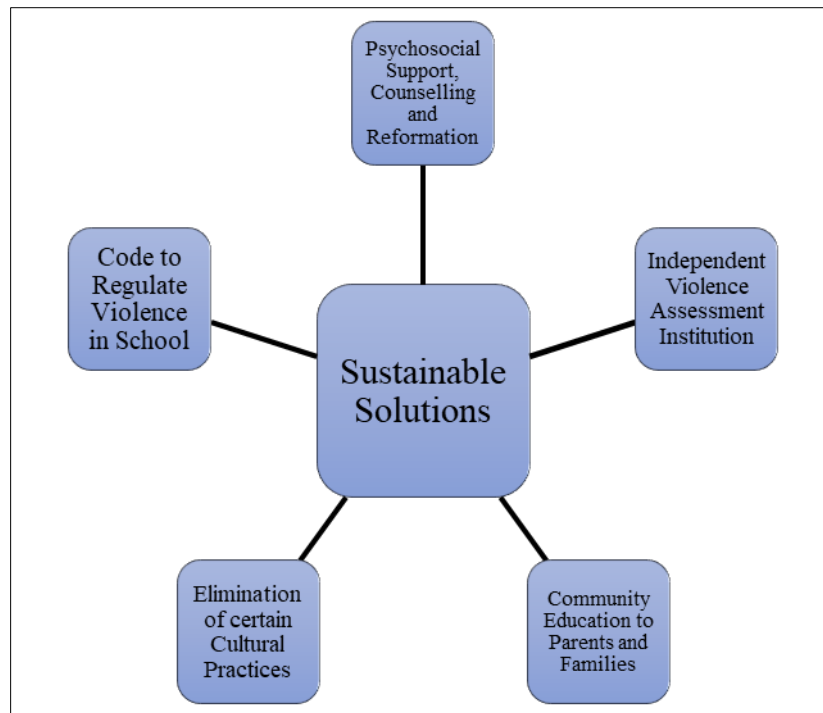### 2.12.14. Community Education to Parents, Households and Families

The Ministry of Secondary Education in synergy with the decentralized territorial collectivities that includes the Regional Council, Regional Assembly (North West and South West Region), City Council and Municipal Council should inform and caution the parents, households and families about the dangers of violence, causes and effects of violence, measures to minimize the consequences of violence, citizenship, patriotism, harmonious living together, national integration and love for one another and the nation. This community education should also be carried out in the quarters and neighborhoods of towns and cities.

2.12.15. Elimination of certain Cultural Practices

The use of weapons such as guns, cutlasses, knives and spears by certain tribes during cultural display such as traditional ceremony and dance should be abolished or discarded. The use of these dangerous weapons is common with some tribes in the Far North, North and Adamawa Regions of Cameroon as well as in the West and the North West Regions of Cameroon.

2.12.16. Code to Regulate Violence in Secondary Schools

A law should be deliberated, promulgated and enacted to lay down the rules applicable to the types, causes, effects, prevention, solutions and regulation of violence in Cameroon schools.

Source: Author's conception (2024).

Figure 2 Sustainable Solutions to mitigate Violence in School

3. Conclusion

Students, teachers and administrative staffs have often been victims of violence in school. Violence have been rampant in school milieu in contemporary times with devastating consequences on students, teachers and administrative staffs. School violence may be committed by students, teachers or other members of the school staffs. However, violence by fellow students is the most common in Cameroon schools. These violent acts disrupt learning and have a negative effect on students, schools and the community (Achuo and Dinga, 2024).

Violence in Cameroon schools have devastating consequences on humans (students, teachers and administrative staffs), environment (school and community environment) and the economy of Cameroon. It therefore requires the concerted and holistic initiative and effort of all the stakeholders, the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Government to mitigate violence in Cameroon schools for a serene, calm, convivial, conducive and pleasant school environment to learn, teach and work.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

References

[1] Achuo, E. D. and Dinga G. D. (2024). Exploring the nature, causes and consequences of school-based violence in Cameroon. International Journal of Educational Development, Volume 109, 2024, 103080. ISSN 0738-0593, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2024.103080.

[2] American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, (2017). 3615 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20016-3007. No. 55; December 2017.

[3] Balasooriya, A. S. (2001). UNESCO Office New Delhi and Regional Bureau for Communication and Information in Asia and the Pacific. learning the way of peace: A teachers' guide to peace education. United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization, New Delhi. Retrieved 16:19, October 2022 from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001252/125228eo.pdf.

[4] Boran, L. and Taskan I. (2021). The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education-October 2021. Volume 11, Issue 4.

[5] Borum, R. et al. (2010) "What Can Be Done About School Shootings? A Review of the Evidence," Educational Researcher 39 no. 1 (February 2010): 27-37.

[6] Ehiri J.E., Hitchcock L.I., Ejere H.O. and Mytton J.A. (2017). Primary prevention interventions for reducing school violence. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2017;2017(3):CD006347. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD006347. Pub2.

[7] Geeta, V. (2019). The Importance of a Positive Learning Environment. Educationist. October 4, 2019. Retrieved 06:34, September 30, 2022 from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/importance-positive-learning-environment-geeta-verma.

[8] Gupta, S. (2022). What is School Violence? Verywell Mind. (2022, January 24). Retrieved 09:58, September 30, 2022 from https://www.verywellmind.com/school-violence-types-causes-impact-and-prevention-5216631#citation-1.

[9] Law Insider Dictionary. (2013). Legal Definitions Dictionary. Retrieved 06:46, September 30, 2022 from https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/violent-behavior.

[10] Levin, E. 2003. Teaching Young Children in Violent Times: Building a Peaceable Classroom, second edition. Washington, DC: co-published by NAEYC and Educators for Social Responsibility.

[11] Life Persona, (2022). Top 10 Types of School Violence. Retrieved 19:10, October 03, 2022 from https://www.lifepersona.com/top-10-types-of-school-violence.

[12] Nemours Foundation, (2022). School violence: what students can do. Retrieved 18:38, October 03, 2022 from https://www.verywellmind.com/school-violence-types-causes-impact-and-prevention-5216631#citation-4.

[13] Sukran, C. (2020). Peaceful and Happy Schools: How to Build Positive Learning Environments. March 2020, Volume 12, Issue 4, 311-320.

[14] UNESCO, (2020). What you need to know about school violence and bullying. Retrieved 14:01, October 03, 2022 from https://en.unesco.org/news/what-you-need-know-about-school-violence-and-bullying.

[15] UNESCO, (2017). School Violence and Bullying: Global Status Report. Paris, UNESCO. pp. 9, 110–111. ISBN 978-92-3-100197-0.

[16] White, J. (2019). Addressing school violence and bullying. Evidence review. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland; 2019.